

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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R 200915Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8764

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL TRIESTE

AMCONSUL ZAGREB UNN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELGRADE 1258

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR YO IT

SUBJ: OLD ITALO-YUGOSLAV QUARREL OVER ZONE B RENEWED

1. THE GOY HAS REACTED SHARPLY TO AN UNPUBLISHED ITALIAN NOTE OF MARCH 11 REGARDING ZONE B OF THE FORMER FREE TERRITORY OF TRIESTE, AND DEPUTY SECRETARY PETRIC CALLED IN AMBASSADOR MACCOTTA ON MARCH 14 TO HAND HIM STIFF REPLY AND GENERALLY READ HIM THE RIOT ACT. POLITIKA EDITORIAL MARCH 17 EXPRESSED ALARM THAT QUESTION WAS STILL A QUESTION OF SOME SORT OF 'ITALIAN' TERRITORY ALLEGEDLY UNDER YUGOSLAV ADMINISTRATION", AND IT CONCLUDED THAT THIS NEW ATTITUDE IN ROME RAISED FASCIST ASPIRATION "AIMED AT UNDERMINING PEACE AND THE STABILIZATION OF CONDITIONS IN EUROPE". ADDITIONALLY, ITALIAN NAVAL ATTACHE HAS ADVISED THAT YUGOSLAVS HAVE ABRUPTLY CANCELLED AN ITALIAN FLEET VISIT TO BUDROVNIK ORIGINALLY APPROVED FOR THE FIRST WEEK IN APRIL.

2. ITALIAN EMBASSY OFFICER PROVIDED EMBOFF WITH THE FOLLOWING BACKGROUND INFORMATION IN STRICT CONFIDENCE. HE SAID ALL ACTION HAS TAKEN PLACE IN ROME, TO THE EXTENT THAT ITALIAN EMBASSY HERE WAS NOT AWARE OF CONTENTS OF ITALIAN NOTE
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UNTIL NOON YESTERDAY.

(A) IN LATE JANUARY OR EARLY FEBRUARY, ITALIAN CONSUL GENERAL IN KOPER REPORTED TO ROME THAT THE YUGOSLAVS HAD ERECTED SIGNS AT BORDER BETWEEN FORMER ZONE A AND B WHICH SAID "WELCOME TO THE SFRJ" AND "WELCOME TO THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA".

(B) ON JANUARY 16 ITALIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS DUCI HANDED THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR IN ROME A "VERY TOUGH" NOTE WHICH PROTESTED THIS ACTION AND WHICH CLAIMED THAT ZONE B WAS ITALIAN TERRITORY. THIS NOTE WAS TAKEN BACK ON FEBRUARY 18, AND DUCI INFORMED THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR ORALLY THAT, WHILE HE WAS STILL PROTESTING THE SIGNS, ITALY RECOGNIZED YUGOSLAV ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL OVER ZONE B, NO MENTION BEING MADE OF ITS SOVEREIGN STATUS.

(C) SEVERAL DAYS LATER THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR ASKED DUCI FOR A FORMAL NOTE TO COVER THEIR CONVERSATION OF FEBRUARY 18, RESULT WAS ITALIAN NOTE OF MARCH 11, IN WHICH THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN CLAIM OF SOVEREIGNTY OVER ZONE B WAS ASSERTED, NOTWITHSTANDING DUCI'S FEBRUARY 18 ASSERTIONS.

3. ITALIAN EMBASSY OFFICER STATED THAT THE OFFICIAL ITALIAN RESPONSE TO THE YUGOSLAVS STRONG REACTION WILL BE EITHER A PUBLIC COMMUNIQUE STATING IN VAGUE TERMS THE ITALIAN DESIRE FOR NORMAL AND FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH YUGOSLAVIA OR A NOTE ALONG THE SAME LINES WHICH WOULD NOT, HOWEVER, RETRACT SPECIFICALLY THAT PART ABOUT THE LEGAL STATUS OF ZONE B. HE SPECULATED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER ALDO MORO AND THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS MIGHT HAVE "THROWN A BONE TO THE FASCISTS" FOR THEIR SUPPORT ON THE DIVORCE LAW REPEAL ISSUE BY SEEMING TO SUPPORT IRREDENTIST CLAIMS ON ZONE B. HE EXPRESSED THE PERSONAL HOPE THAT MUTUAL OVERRIDING ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL MOTIVES FOR MAINTAINING GOOD BI-LATERAL RELATIONS WOULD HELP TO MUTE THE ISSUE. NEVERTHELESS, THE FREE TERRITORY OF TRIESTE ISSUE, LONG QUIESCENT, HAS NOW BEEN PUSHED BACK INTO THE HEADLINES AS A RESULT OF OVER REACTION ON BOTH SIDES TO RELATIVELY MINOR DEVELOPMENT ON BORDEER. (SEE BELGRADE A-90 OF FEB 13 RE YUGOSLAV VIEW OF TRIESTE QUESTION).
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